

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 201
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

Goethe's Conversations With Eckermann

Selected and Edited by
Julius Goebel
University of Illinois



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INTRODUCTION

It has long been recognized that letters, memoirs, and above all, faithfully reported conversations of eminent writers afford us the deepest insight, not only into their personality and character, but also into the secret springs of their literary productions. Among Goethe's many conversations with men of various ranks and stations of life, which have come down to us, and which are now collected in five large volumes, those of Johann Peter Eckermann have always been considered the richest and most varied in content, as well as the most genuine and accurate in the expression of Goethe's thought. After their publication in 1836, many persons who had known Goethe intimately averred that they heard Goethe speaking while perusing the volumes.

Johann Peter Eckermann (1792-1854) was a self-made man in the best sense of the word. In the introduction to the Conversations with Goethe, he tells us himself how he was born and raised in extreme poverty, how, in spite of the greatest obstacles, he managed to acquire a liberal education, and began to write poetry and critical essays, and how, finally, after having sent a copy of his poems to Goethe, who replied encouragingly, he walked from Hanover to Weimar to obtain an interview with the great poet. Goethe recognized at once the excellent qualities of the quiet, discreet, well-informed and highly receptive young man,

asked him to become his private secretary, and finally, after a long and faithful service, appointed him his literary executor.

It was due to these qualities that Eckermann in the intimate intercourse with Goethe, during the last nine years of the latter's life, became more to the poet than a mere amanuensis. With great skill and fine tact, he knew how to induce Goethe to take up and complete some of his half-finished works, such as Faust, or to engage the poet in conversations during which the latter, otherwise noted for his taciturnity, opened the inmost recesses of his mind and heart. It is the unpremeditated flow of thought in these conversations which constitute both their value and their exquisite charm. So great was Eckermann's reverence for his benefactor, and so pronounced was the objectiveness of observation which he had absorbed from his master, that the records which he made daily of the latter's utterances, could not be otherwise than absolutely truthful.

The present little book presents only extracts from the three volumes of conversations published by Eckermann; but a mere glance at the headings under which the editor has assembled these extracts may give the reader an idea of the importance of the subjects discussed by Goethe.

It is interesting to note that it was a distinguished American woman, who first recognized the value of these conversations, and first translated them into English: Margaret Fuller, the foremost early interpreter of Goethe

in America.* In the remarkable introduction to her translation, a spirited defense of Goethe against the attacks of Puritan bigotry, she characterizes the conversations as follows:

"The book before us has merits which Goethe's correspondence with men infinitely greater than Eckermann do not possess. It paints Goethe to us as he was in the midst of his family and in the most careless and weary hours. Under such circumstances, whatever may be thought of his views, his courteous grace, his calm wisdom, and reliance on the harmony of his faith with his nature, must be felt, by the unprejudiced reader, to be beautiful and rare."

J. G.

*See *Margaret Fuller and Goethe*, by Dr. F. A. Braun, New York, 1910.

GOETHE'S CONVERSATIONS WITH ECKERMANN

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

"When I look back to the earlier and middle periods of my life, and now in my old age think how few are left of those who were young with me, I always think of a summer residence at a bathing-place. When you arrive, you make acquaintance and friends of those who have already been there some time, and who leave in a few weeks. The loss is painful. Then you turn to the second generation, with which you live a good while, and become most intimate. But this goes also, and leaves us alone with the third, which comes just as we are going away, and with which we have, properly, nothing to do.

"I have ever been esteemed one of Fortune's chiefest favourites; nor will I complain or find fault with the course my life has taken. Yet, truly, there has been nothing but toil and care; and I may say that, in all my seventy-five years, I have never had a month of genuine comfort. It has been the perpetual rolling of a stone, which I have always had to raise anew. My annals will render clear what I now say. The claims upon my activity, both from within and without, were too numerous.

"My real happiness was my poetic meditation and production. But how was this disturbed, limited, and hindered by my external position! Had I been able to abstain more from public business, and to live more in solitude, I should have been happier, and should have accomplished much more as a poet. But,

soon after my 'Goetz' and 'Werther,' that saying of a sage was verified for me—"If you do anything for the sake of the world, it will take good care that you shall not do it a second time.'

"A wide-spread celebrity, and elevated position in life, are good things. But, for all my rank and celebrity, I am still obliged to be silent as to the opinions of others, that I may not give offence. This would be but poor sport, if by this means I had not the advantage of learning the thoughts of others without their being able to learn mine." * * * * *

"Friends, such as Schiller and I, intimate for years, with the same interests, in habits of daily intercourse, and under reciprocal obligations, live so completely into one another, that it is hardly possible to decide to which of the two the particular thoughts belong.

"We have made many distiches together; sometimes I gave the thought, and Schiller made the verse; sometimes the contrary was the case; sometimes he made one line and I the other. What matters the mine and thine? One must be a thorough Philistine, indeed, to attach the slightest importance to the solution of such questions."

"Something similar," said I "often happens in the literary world, when people, for instance, doubt the originality of this or that celebrated man, and seek to trace out the sources from whence he obtained his cultivation."

"That is very ridiculous," said Goethe; "we might as well question a strong man about the oxen, sheep, and swine which he has eaten, and which have given him strength."

"We are indeed born with faculties; but we owe our development to a thousand influences of the great world, from which we appropriate to ourselves what we can, and what is suitable to us. I owe much to the Greeks and French; I am infinitely indebted to Shakespeare, Sterne, and Goldsmith; but in saying this I do not show the sources of my culture; that would be an endless as well as an unnecessary task. What is important is to have a soul which loves truth, and receives it wherever it finds it.

"Besides, the world is now so old, so many eminent men have lived and thought for thousands of years, that there is little new to be discovered or expressed. Even my theory of colours is not entirely new. Plato, Leonardo da Vinci, and many other excellent men, have before me found and expressed the same thing in a detached form; my merit is, that I have found it also, that I have said it again, and that I have striven to bring the truth once more into a confused world.

"The truth must be repeated over and over again, because error is repeatedly preached among us, not only by individuals, but by the masses. In periodicals and cyclopedias, in schools and universities; everywhere, in fact, error prevails, and is quite easy in the feeling that it has a decided majority on its side."

"Human nature possesses wonderful powers," said Goethe, "and has something good in readiness for us when we least hope for it. There have been times in my life when I have fallen asleep in tears; but in my dreams the most charming forms have come to console and to

cheer me, and I have risen the next morning fresh and joyful.

"There is something more or less wrong among us old Europeans; our relations are far too artificial and complicated, our nutriment and mode of life are without their proper nature, and our social intercourse is without proper love and good will. Every one is polished and courteous; but no one has the courage to be hearty and true, so that an honest man, with natural views and feelings, stands in a very bad position. Often one cannot help wishing that one had been born upon one of the South Sea Islands, a so-called savage, so as to have thoroughly enjoyed human existence in all its purity, without any adulteration.

"If in a depressed mood one reflects deeply upon the wretchedness of our age, it often occurs to one that the world is gradually approaching the last day. And the evil accumulates from generation to generation! For it is not enough that we have to suffer for the sins of our fathers, but we hand down to posterity these inherited vices increased by our own."

"Similar thoughts often occur to me," answered I; "but, if, at such time, I see a regiment of German dragoons ride by me, and observe the beauty and power of these young people, I again derive some consolation, and say to myself, that the durability of mankind is after all not in such desperate plight."

"Our country people," returned Goethe, "have certainly kept up their strength, and will, I hope, long be able not only to furnish us with

good horsemen, but also to secure us from total decay and destruction. The rural population may be regarded as a magazine, from which the forces of declining mankind are always recruited and refreshed. But just go into our great towns, and you will feel quite differently. Just take a turn by the side of a second *Diable boiteux*, or a physician with a large practice, and he will whisper to you tales which will horrify you at the misery, and astonish you at the vice with which human nature is visited, and from which society suffers.” * * * * *

“But, in fact, we are all collective beings, let us place ourselves as we may. For how little *have* we, and *are* we, that we can strictly call our own property? We must all receive and learn both from those who were before us, and from those who are with us. Even the greatest genius would not go far if he tried to owe everything to his own internal self. •But many very good men do not comprehend that; and they grope in darkness for half a life, with their dreams of originality. I have known artists who boasted of having followed no master, and of having to thank their own genius for everything. Fools! as if that were possible at all; and as if the world would not force itself upon them at every step, and make something of them in spite of their own stupidity. Yes, I maintain that if such an artist were only to survey the walls of this room, and cast only a passing glance at the sketches of some great master, with which they are hung, he would necessarily, if he had any

genius at all, quit this place another and a higher man. And, indeed, what is there good in us, if it is not the power and the inclination to appropriate to ourselves the resources of the outward world, and to make them subservient to our higher ends. I may speak of myself, and may modestly say what I feel. It is true that, in my long life, I have done and achieved many things of which I might certainly boast. But to speak the honest truth, what had I that was properly my own, besides the ability and the inclination to see and to hear, to distinguish and to choose, and to enliven with some mind what I had seen and heard, and to reproduce with some degree of skill. I by no means owe my works to my own wisdom alone, but to a thousand things and persons around me, who provided me with material. There were fools and sages, minds enlightened and narrow, childhood, youth, and mature age—all told me what they thought, how they lived and worked, and what experiences they had gained; and I had nothing further to do than to put out my hand and reap what others had sown for me.

"It is, in fact, utter folly to ask whether a person has anything for himself, or whether he has it from others; whether he operates by himself, or whether he operates by means of others. The main point is to have a great will, and skill and perseverance to carry it out."

* * * * *

Goethe showed me an elegant green elbow chair, which he had lately bought at an auction.

"However," said he, "I shall use it but little,

or not at all; for all kinds of commodiousness are against my nature. You see in my chamber no sofa; I always sit in my old wooden chair, and never till a few weeks ago have I had a leaning-place put for my head. If surrounded by convenient furniture, my thoughts are absorbed, and I am placed in an agreeable but passive state. Unless we are accustomed to them from early youth, splendid chambers and elegant furniture are for people who neither have nor can have any thoughts." * * * * *

"I never had much respect for mere princely rank as such, when there was not behind it sound human nature, and sound human worth. Nay, I felt so satisfied with myself, that if I had been made a prince I should not have thought the change so very remarkable. When the diploma of nobility was given me, many thought that I should feel elevated by it; but, between ourselves, it was nothing to me—really nothing! We Frankfort patricians always considered ourselves equal to the nobility; and when I held the diploma in my hands I had nothing more, in my own opinion, than I had possessed long ago." * * * * *

"People were never thoroughly contented with me, but always wished me otherwise than it has pleased God to make me. There were also seldom contented with my productions. When I had long exerted my whole soul to favour the world with a new work, it still desired that I should thank it into the bargain for considering the work endurable. If any one praised me, I was not allowed, in self-congratulation, to receive it as a well-merited tribute;

but people expected from me some modest expression, humbly setting forth the total unworthiness of myself and my work. However, my nature opposed this; and I should have been a miserable hypocrite if I had so tried to lie and dissemble. Since I was strong enough to show myself in my whole truth, just as I felt, I was deemed proud, and am considered so to the present day.

"In religious, scientific, and political matters, I generally brought trouble upon myself, because I was no hypocrite, and had the courage to express what I felt.

"I believed in God and in Nature, and in the triumph of good over evil; but this was not enough for pious souls; I was also required to believe other points, which were opposed to the feeling of my soul for truth; besides, I did not see that these would be of the slightest service to me." * * * * *

"That undisturbed, innocent, somnambulatory production, by which alone anything great can thrive, is no longer possible. Our talents at present lie before the public. The daily criticisms which appear in fifty different places, and the gossip that is caused by them amongst the public, prevent the appearance of any sound production. In the present day, he who does not keep aloof from all this, and isolate himself by main force, is lost. Through the bad, chiefly negative, aesthetical and critical tone of the journals, a sort of half culture finds its way into the masses; but to productive talent it is a noxious mist, a dropping poison, which destroys the tree of creative power, from the

ornamental green leaves, to the deepest pith and the most hidden fibres.

"And then how tame and weak has life itself become during the last two shabby centuries. Where do we now meet an original nature? and where is the man who has the strength to be true, and to show himself as he is? This, however, affects the poet, who must find all within himself, while he is left in the lurch be all without." * * * * *

"That divine enlightenment, whence everything proceeds, we shall always find in connection with youth and productiveness, as in the case of Napoleon, who was one of the most productive men that ever lived.

"Yes, yes, my good friend, one need not write poems and plays to be productive; there is also a productiveness of deeds, which in many cases stands an important degree higher. The physician himself must be productive, if he really intends to heal; if he is not so, he will only succeed now and then as if by chance; but, on the whole he will be only a bungler."

"You appear," added I, "in this case, to call productiveness that which is usually called genius."

"One lies very near the other," returned Goethe. 'For what is genius but that productive power by which deeds arise that can display themselves before God and nature, and are therefore permanent, and produce results. All Mozart's works are of this kind; there lies in them a productive power which operates upon generation after generation, and still is not wasted or consumed.

It is the same with other great composers and artists. What an influence have Phidias and Raphael had upon succeeding centuries, and Duerer and Holbein also. He who first invented the forms and proportions of the old German architecture, so that in the course of time a Strassburg minster and a cathedral of Cologne were possible, was also a genius; for his thoughts have a power continually productive, and operate even to the present hour. Luther was a genius of a very important kind; he has already gone on with influence for many a day, and we cannot count the days when he will cease to be productive in future ages. Lessing would not allow himself the lofty title of a genius; but his permanent influence bears witness against him. On the other hand, we have, in literature, other names and those of importance, the possessors of which, whilst they lived, were deemed great geniuses, but whose influence ended with their life, and who were therefore less than they and others thought. For, as I said before, there is no genius without a productive power of permanent influence; and furthermore, genius does not depend upon the business, the art, or the trade which one follows, but may be alike in all. Whether one shows oneself a man of genius in science, like Oken and Humboldt, or in war and statesmanship, like Frederick, Peter the Great, and Napoleon, or whether one composes a song like Beranger, it all comes to the same thing; the only point is, whether the thought, the discovery, the deed, is living and can live on.

"Then I must add, it is not the mass of cre-

ations and deeds which proceed from a person, that indicates the productive man. We have, in literature, poets who are considered very productive, because volume after volume of their poems has appeared. But, in my opinion, these people ought to be called thoroughly unproductive; for what they have written is without life and durability. Goldsmith, on the contrary, has written so few poems that their number is not worth mentioning; but, nevertheless, I must pronounce him to be a thoroughly productive poet, and, indeed, even on that account, because the little that he has written has an inherent life which can sustain itself."

* * * * *

"Every *Entelecheia** is a piece of eternity, and the few years during which it is bound to the earthly body does not make it old. If this *Entelecheia* is of a trivial kind, it will exercise but little sway during its bodily confinement; on the contrary, the body will predominate, and when this grows old the *Entelecheia* will not hold and restrain it. But if the *Entelecheia* is of a powerful kind, as is the case with all men of natural genius, then with its animating penetration of the body it will not only act with strengthening and ennobling power upon the organization, but it will also endeavor with its spiritual superiority to confer the privilege of perpetual youth, thence it comes that in men of superior endowments, even during their old age, we constantly perceive fresh epochs of singular productiveness; they seem constantly to grow young again for a time, and that is

*Readers who do not know Greek may best translate this term with the word "soul."

what I call a repeated puberty. Still youth is youth, and however powerful an *Entelecheia* may prove, it will never become quite master of the corporeal, and it makes a wonderful difference whether it finds in the body an ally or an adversary.

"There was a time in my life when I had to furnish a printed sheet every day, and I accomplished it with facility. I wrote my "Geschwister" (Brother and Sister) in three days; my "Clavigo," as you know, in a week. Now it seems I can do nothing of the kind, and still can by no means complain of want of productiveness even at my advanced age. But whereas in my youth I succeeded daily and under all circumstances, I now succeed only periodically and under certain favourable conditions. When ten or twelve years ago, in the happy time after the war of independence, the poems of the "Divan" had me in their power, I was often productive enough to compose two or three in a day, and it was all the same to me whether I was in the open air, in the chariot, or at an inn. Now, I can only work at the second part of my "Faust" during the early part of the day, when I feel revived by sleep, and have not been perplexed by the trifles of daily life. And after all what is it I achieve? Under the most favourable circumstances, a page of writing, but generally only so much as one could write in the space of a hand-breadth, and often, when in an unproductive humour, still less."

* * * * *

"No productiveness of the highest kind, no remarkable discovery, no great thought which

bears fruit and has results, is in the power of any one; but such things are elevated above all earthly control. Man must consider them as an unexpected gift from above, as pure children of God, which he must receive and venerate with joyful thanks. They are akin to the demon, which does with him what it pleases, and to which he unconsciously resigns himself, whilst he believes he is acting from his own impulse. In such cases, man may often be considered as an instrument in a higher government of the world,—as a vessel found worthy for the reception of a divine influence. I say this, whilst I consider how often a single thought has given a different form to whole centuries, and how individual men have, by their expressions, imprinted a stamp upon their age, which has remained uneffaced, and has operated beneficially upon succeeding generations.

“There is, however, a productiveness of another kind subjected to earthly influences, and which man has more in his power, although he here also finds cause to bow before something divine. Under this category I place all that appertains to the execution of a plan, all the links of a chain of thought, the ends of which already shine forth; I also place there all that constitutes the visible body of a work of art.

“Thus, Shakespeare was inspired with the first thought of his Hamlet, when the spirit of the whole presented itself to his mind as an unexpected impression, and he surveyed the several situations, characters, and conclusion, in an elevated mood, as a pure gift from above, on which he had no immediate influence, al-

though the possibility of conceiving such a thought certainly presupposed a mind such as his. But the individual scenes, and the dialogue of the characters, he had completely in his power, so that he might produce them daily and hourly, and work at them for weeks if he liked. And, indeed, we see in all that he has achieved constantly the same power of production; and in all his plays we never come to a passage of which it could be said 'this was not written in the proper humour, or with the most perfect faculty'. Whilst we read him, we receive the impression of a man thoroughly strong and healthy, both in mind and body.

"Supposing, however, that the bodily constitution of a dramatic poet were not so strong and excellent, and that he were, on the contrary, subject to frequent illness and weakness, the productiveness necessary for the daily construction of his scenes would very frequently cease, and would often fail him for whole days. If now, by some spirituous drink, he tried to force his failing productiveness, and supply its deficiencies, the method would certainly answer, but it would be discoverable in all the scenes in which he had written under such an influence, to their great disadvantage. My counsel is, therefore, to force nothing, and rather to trifle and sleep away all unproductive days and hours, than on such days to compose something which will afterwards give one no pleasure."

LITERATURE AND ART

"The poet," said Goethe, "should seize the Particular, and he should, if there be anything

sound in it, thus represent the Universal. The English History is excellent for poetry, because it is something genuine, healthy, and therefore universal, which repeats itself over and over again. The French history, on the contrary, is not for poetry, as it represents an era that cannot come again. The literature of the French, so far as it is founded on that era, stands as something of merely particular interest, which must grow old with time.

"The present era of French literature," said Goethe afterwards, "cannot be judged fairly. The German influence causes a great fermentation there, and we probably shall not know for twenty years what the result will be."

We then talked of the æsthetic writers, who labour to express the nature of poetry and the poet in abstract definitions without arriving at any clear result.

"What need of much definition?" said Goethe. "Lively feeling of situations, and power to express them, make the poet." * * * * *

I went to Goethe about 5 o'clock. I had not seen him for some days, and passed a delightful evening. I found him sitting in his working-room, and talking, during the twilight, with his son and Hofrath Rehbein, his physician, I seated myself at the table with them. We talked a while in the dusk; then lights were brought in, and I had the happiness to see Goethe looking perfectly fresh and cheerful.

As usual, he inquired with interest what had happened to me of late, and I replied that I had made the acquaintance of a poetess. I was able at the same time to praise her uncommon

talent, and Goethe, who was likewise acquainted with some of her productions, agreed with my commendation.

"One of her poems," said he, "in which she describes the country near her home, is of a highly peculiar character. She has a good tendency towards outward objects, and is besides not destitute of valuable internal qualities. We might indeed find much fault with her; but we will let her alone, and not disturb her in the path which her talent will show her."

The conversation now turned on poetesses in general; Hofrath Rehbein remarked that the poetical talent of ladies often seemed to him as a sexual instinct of the intellect. "Hear him," said Goethe, laughing, and looking at me; "sexual instinct, indeed! how the physician explains it!"

"I know not," said Rehbein, "whether I express myself right; but it is something of the sort. Usually, these beings have not been fortunate in love, and they now seek compensation in intellectual pursuits. Had they been married in time and borne children, they would never have thought of poetical productions."

"I will not inquire," said Goethe, "how far you are right in this case; but as to the talents of ladies in other departments, I have always found that they ceased on marriage. I have known girls who drew finely; but so soon as they became wives and mothers it was all over: they were busy with their children, and never touched a pencil.

"But our poetesses," continued he, with much

animation, "might write and poetize as they pleased if only our men would not write like women. This it is that does not please me. Look at our periodicals and annuals; see how all becomes weaker and weaker. Were a chapter of Cellini now printed in the 'Morgenblatt,' what a figure it would make!" * * * * *

Dined at Goethe's, and enjoyed some cheerful conversation. Mention was made of a young beauty belonging to the Weimar society, when one of the guests remarked that he was on the point of falling in love with her, although her understanding could not exactly be called brilliant.

"Pshaw," said Goethe, laughing, "as if love had anything to do with the understanding. The things that we love in a young lady are something very different from the understanding. We love in her beauty, youthfulness, playfulness, trustingness, her character, her faults, her caprices, and God knows what 'je ne sais quoi' besides; but we do not love her understanding. We respect her understanding when it is brilliant, and by it the worth of a girl can be infinitely enhanced in our eyes. Understanding may also serve to fix our affections when we already love; but the understanding is not that which is capable of firing our hearts, and awakening a passion." * * * * *

I remarked that mere motives excited in me such lively emotions, that I felt as if I were reading the poems themselves, and had no desire for the details.

"You are quite right," said Goethe, "so it is; and here you see the great importance of mo-

tives, which no one will understand. Our women have no notion of it. 'That poem is beautiful,' they say, and by this they mean nothing but the feelings, the words, the verses. No one dreams that the true power of a poem consists in the situation,—in the motives. And for this very reason, thousands of poems are written, where the motives are nothing at all, and which merely through feeling and sounding verse reflect a sort of existence. Dilettanti, and especially women, have very weak ideas of poetry. They usually think, if they could but get quit of the technical part, they would have the essential, and would be quite accomplished; but they are much mistaken."

"I am more and more convinced," Goethe continued, "that poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere, and at all times, in hundreds and hundreds of men. One makes it a little better than another, and swims on the surface a little longer than another—that is all. Herr von Matthisson must not think he is the man, nor must I think that I am the man; but each must say to himself, that the gift of poetry is by no means so very rare, and that nobody need think very much of himself because he has written a good poem.

"But, really, we Germans are very likely to fall too easily into this pedantic conceit, when we do not look beyond the narrow circle that surrounds us. I therefore like to look about me in foreign nations, and advise every one to do the same. National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World litera-

ture is at hand, and every one must strive to hasten its approach. But, while we thus value what is foreign, we must not bind ourselves to anything in particular, and regard it as a model. We must not give this value to the Chinese, or the Servian, or Calderon, or the Nibelungen; but if we really want a pattern, we must always return to the ancient Greeks, in whose works the beauty of mankind is constantly represented. All the rest we must look at only historically, appropriating to ourselves what is good, so far as it goes." * * * * *

"The idea of the distinction between classical and romantic poetry, which is now spread over the whole world, and occasions so many quarrels and divisions, came originally from Schiller and myself. I laid down the maxim of objective treatment in poetry, and would allow no other; but Schiller, who worked quite in the subjective way, deemed his own fashion the right one, and to defend himself against me, wrote the treatise upon 'Naive and Sentimental Poetry'. He proved to me that I myself, against my will, was romantic, and that my 'Iphigenia,' through the predominance of sentiment, was by no means so classical and so much in the antique spirit as some people supposed.

"The Schlegels took up this idea, and carried it further, so that it has now been diffused over the whole world; and every one talks about classicism and romanticism—of which nobody thought fifty years ago." * * * * *

We then came to the newest French poets, and the meaning of the terms "classic" and "romantic".

"A new expression occurs to me," said Goethe, "which does not ill define the state of the case. I call the classic healthy, the romantic sickly. In this sense, the 'Nibelungenlied' is as classic as the Iliad, for both are vigorous and healthy. If we distinguish 'classic' and 'romantic' by these qualities, it will be easy to see our way clearly."

* * * * *

"The Germans are, certainly, strange people. By their deep thoughts and ideas, which they seek in everything and fix upon everything, they make life much more burdensome than is necessary. Only have the courage to give yourself up to your impressions, allow yourself to be delighted, moved, elevated, nay, instructed and inspired for something great; but do not imagine all is vanity, if it is not abstract thought and idea.

"Then they come and ask, 'What idea I meant to embody in my Faust' as if I knew myself and could inform them. From heaven, through the world, to hell, would indeed be something; but this is no idea, only a course of action. And further, that the devil loses the wager, and that a man, continually struggling from difficult errors towards something better, should be redeemed, is an effective, and to many, a good enlightening thought; but it is no idea which lies at the foundation of the whole, and of every individual scene. It would have become a fine thing, indeed, if I had strung so rich, varied, and highly diversified a life as I have brought to view in Faust upon the slender string of one pervading idea.

"It was, in short," continued Goethe, "not in

my line, as a poet, to strive to embody anything abstract. I received in my mind impressions, and those of a sensual, animated, charming, varied, hundredfold kind, just as a lively imagination presented them; and I had, as a poet, nothing more to do than artistically to round off and elaborate such views and impressions, and by means of a lively representation so to bring them forward that others might receive the same impression in hearing or reading my representation of them.

"If I still wished, as a poet, to represent any idea, I would do it in short poems, where a decided unity could prevail, and where a complete survey would be easy, as, for instance, in the *Metamorphosis of Animals*, that of the plants, the poem 'Bequest' (*Vermaechtnis*); and many others. The only production of greater extent, in which I am conscious of having laboured to set forth a pervading idea, is probably my 'Wahlverwandschaften.' This novel has thus become comprehensible to the understanding; but I will not say that it is therefore better. I am rather of the opinion, that the more incommensurable, and the more incomprehensible to the understanding, a poetic production is, so much the better it is."

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We conversed upon some subjects of natural science; particularly upon the imperfection and insufficiency of language, by which errors and false views which afterwards could not easily be overcome were spread abroad. "The case is simply this," said Goethe. "All languages have arisen from surrounding human necessities, human occupations, and the general feel-

ings and views of man. If, now, a superior man gains an insight into the secret operations of nature, the language which has been handed down to him is not sufficient to express anything so remote from human affairs. He ought to have at command the language of spirits to express adequately his peculiar perceptions. But as this is not the case, he must, in his views of the extraordinary in nature, always grasp at human expressions, with which he always falls too short, lowering his subject, or even injuring and destroying it."

"If you say this," said I, "you who always pursue your subjects very closely, and, as an enemy to phrases, can always find the most fitting expressions for your higher perceptions, there is something in it. But I should have thought that, generally, we Germans might be contented. Our language is so extraordinarily rich, elaborated, and capable of progress, that even if we are obliged sometimes to have recourse to a trope, we can still arrive pretty nearly at the proper expression. The French are at a great disadvantage when compared with us. With them the expression for some higher view of nature by a trope, generally borrowed from a technicality, is at once material and vulgar, so that it is by no means adequate to a higher view."

"How right you are," said Goethe, "has appeared to me lately, on the occasion of the dispute between Cuvier and Geoffrey de St. Hilaire. Geoffrey de St. Hilaire is a man who has certainly a great insight into the spiritual workings of nature; but his French language,

so far as he is constrained to use traditional expressions, leaves him quite in the lurch. And this not only in mysteriously spiritual, but also in visible, purely corporeal subjects and relations. If he would express the single parts of an organic being, he has no other word but *materialien*; thus, for instance, the bones, which, as homogeneous parts, form the organic whole of an arm, are placed upon the same scale of expression as the stones and planks with which a house is built.

"In the same inappropriate manner," continued Goethe, "the French use the expression *composition*, in speaking of the productions of nature. I can certainly put together the individual parts of a machine made of separate pieces, and, upon such a subject, speak of a *composition*; but not when I have in my mind the individual parts of an organic whole, which produce themselves with life, and are pervaded by a common soul."

"It appears to me," added I, "that the expression *composition* is also inappropriate and degrading to genuine productions of art and poetry."

"It is a thoroughly contemptible word," returned Goethe, "for which we have to thank the French, and of which we should endeavour to rid ourselves as soon as possible. How can one say, Mozart has *composed* (*componirt*) Don Juan! Composition! As if it were a piece of cake or biscuit, which had been stirred together out of eggs, flour, and sugar! It is a spiritual creation, in which the details, as well as the whole, are pervaded by *one* spirit, and by the

breath of one life; so that the producer did not make experiments, and patch together, and follow his own caprice, but was altogether in the power of the dæmonic spirit of his genius, and acted according to his orders."

HISTORY

Goethe then turned his thoughts backward into history, and talked much of the Prussian army in the Seven Years' War, which, accustomed by Frederic the Great to constant victory grew careless, so that, in after days, it lost many battles from over-confidence. All the minutest details were present to his mind, and I had reason to admire his excellent memory.

"I had the great advantage," said he, "of being born at a time when the greatest events which agitated the world occurred, and such have continued to occur during my long life; so that I am a living witness of the Seven Years' War, of the separation of America from England, of the French Revolution, and of the whole Napoleon era, with the downfall of that hero, and the events which followed. Thus I have attained results and insight impossible to those who are born now and must learn all these things from books which they will not understand.

"What the next years will bring I cannot predict; but I fear we shall not soon have repose. It is not given to the world to be contented; the great are not such that there will be no abuse of power; the masses not such that, in hope of gradual improvement, they will be contented with a moderate condition. Could

we perfect human nature, we might also expect a perfect state of things; but, as it is, there will always be a wavering hither and thither; one part must suffer while the other is at ease; envy and egotism will be always at work like bad demons, and party strife will be without end.

"The most reasonable way is for every one to follow his own vocation to which he has been born, and while he has learned, and to avoid hindering others from following theirs. Let the shoemaker abide by his last, the peasant by his plough, and let the king know how to govern; for this is also a business which must be learned, and with which no one should meddle who does not understand it."

Returning to the French papers, Goethe said,—"The liberals may speak, for when they are reasonable we like to hear them; but with the royalists, who have the executive power in their hands, talking comes amiss—they should act. They may march troops, and behead and hang—that is all right; but attacking opinions, and justifying their measures in public prints, does not become them. If there were a public of kings, they might talk.

"For myself," he continued, "I have always been a royalist. I have let others babble, and have done as I saw fit. I understand my course, and know my own object. If I committed a fault as a single individual, I could make it good again; but if I committed it jointly with three or four others, it would be impossible to make it good, for among others there are many opinions." * * * * *

We talked of the tragic idea of Destiny among the Greeks.

"It no longer suits our way of thinking," said Goethe; "it is obsolete, and is also a contradiction with our religious views. If a modern poet introduces such antique ideas into a drama, it always has an air of affectation. It is a costume which is long since out of fashion, and which, like the Roman toga, no longer suits us.

"It is better for us moderns to say with Napoleon, 'Politics are Destiny.' But let us beware of saying, with our latest literati, that politics are poetry, or a suitable subject for the poet. The English poet Thomson wrote a very good poem on the Seasons, but a very bad one on Liberty, and that not from want of poetry in the poet, but from want of poetry in the subject."

"If a poet would work politically, he must give himself up to a party; and so soon as he does that, he is lost as a poet; he must bid farewell to his free spirit, his unbiased view, and draw over his ears the cap of bigotry and blind hatred.

"The poet, as a man and citizen, will love his native land; but the native land of his poetic powers and poetic action is the good, noble, and beautiful, which is confined to no particular province or country, and which he seizes upon and forms wherever he finds it. Therein is he like the eagle, who hovers with free gaze over whole countries, and to whom it is of no consequence whether the hare on

which he pounces is running in Prussia or in Saxony.

"And, then, what is meant by love of one's country? what is meant by patriotic deeds? If the poet has employed a life in battling with pernicious prejudices, in setting aside narrow views, in enlightening the minds, purifying the tastes, ennobling the feelings and thoughts of his countrymen, what better could he have done? how could he have acted more patriotically?

"To make such ungrateful and unsuitable demands upon a poet is just as if one required the captain of a regiment to show himself a patriot by taking part in political innovations, and thus neglect his proper calling. The captain's country is his regiment, and he will show himself an excellent patriot by troubling himself about political matters only so far as they concern him, and bestowing all his mind and all his care on the battalions under him, trying so to train and discipline them, that they may do their duty if ever their native land should be in peril.

"I hate all bungling like sin, but most of all bungling in state affairs, which produces nothing but mischief to thousands and millions.

"You know that on the whole I care little what is written about me; but yet it comes to my ears, and I know well enough that, hard as I have toiled all my life, all my labors are as nothing in the eyes of certain people. To please such people I must have become a member of a Jacobin club, and preached bloodshed and murder. However, not a word more upon

this wretched subject, lest I become unwise in railing against folly." * * * * *

We then spoke of the unity of Germany, and in what sense it was possible and desirable.

"I am not uneasy," said Goethe, "about the unity of Germany; our good high roads and future railroads will of themselves do their part. But, above all, may Germany be *one* in love! and may it always be *one* against the foreign foe! May it be *one*, so that German dollars and groschen may be of equal value throughout the whole empire! *one*, so that my travelling-chest may pass unopened through all the six-and-thirty states! May it be *one*, so that the town passport of a citizen of Weimar may not be considered insufficient, like that of a mere foreigner, by the frontier officer of a large neighboring state! May there be no more talk about inland and outland among the German states! In fine, may Germany be *one* in weight and measure, in trade and commerce and a hundred similar things which I will not name!

"But if we imagine that the unity of Germany consists in this, that the very great empire should have a great capital, and that this one great capital would conduce to the development of great individual talent, or to the welfare of the great mass of the people, we are in error.

"A state has been justly compared to a living body with many limbs, and thus the capital of a state may be compared to the heart, from which life and prosperity flow to the individual members near and far. But if the members be very distant from the heart, the

life that flows to them will become weaker and weaker. A clever Frenchman, I think Dupin, has sketched a chart of the state of culture in France, and has exhibited the greater or less enlightenment of the different departments by a lighter or darker colour. Now, some departments, particularly in the southern provinces remote from the capital, are represented by a perfectly black colour, as a sign of the great darkness which prevails there. But would that be the case if la belle France, instead of one great focus, had ten foci, whence life and light might proceed?

“Whence is Germany great, but by the admirable culture of the people, which equally pervades all parts of the kingdom? But does not this proceed from the various sets of government, and do not these foster and support it? Suppose, for centuries past, we had had in Germany only the two capitals, Vienna and Berlin, or only one of these, I should like to see how it would have fared with German culture, or even with that generally diffused opulence which goes hand in hand with culture. Germany has about twenty universities distributed about the whole empire, and about a hundred public libraries similarly distributed. There is also a great number of collections of art, and collections of objects belonging to all the kingdoms of nature; for every prince has taken care to bring around him these useful and beautiful objects. There are gymnasia and schools for arts and industry in abundance,—nay, there is scarcely a German village without its school. And how does France stand with respect to this last point!

"Then look at the quantity of German theatres, the number of which exceeds seventy, and which are not to be despised as supporters and promoters of a higher cultivation of the people. In no country is the taste for music and singing, and the practice of it so widely spread, as in Germany; and even that is something!

"And now think of such cities as Dresden, Munich, Stuttgart, Cassel, Brunswick, Hanover, and the like; think of the great elements of life comprised within these cities; think of the effect which they have upon the neighboring provinces; and ask yourself if all this would have been the case if they had not for a long time been the residences of princes?

"Frankfort, Bremen, Hamburg, and Luebeck, are great and brilliant; their effect upon the prosperity of Germany is incalculable. But would they remain what they are, if they lost their own sovereignty and became incorporated with any great German kingdom as a provincial town? I see reason to doubt this." * * * * *

"It is true that I could be no friend to the French Revolution; for its horrors were too near me, and shocked me daily and hourly, whilst its beneficial results were not then to be discovered. Neither could I be indifferent to the fact that the Germans were endeavoring, artificially, to bring about such scenes here, as were in France, the consequence of a great necessity.

"But I was as little a friend to arbitrary rule. Indeed, I was perfectly convinced that a great revolution is never a fault of the people, but of the government. Revolutions are utterly

impossible as long as governments are constantly just and constantly vigilant, so that they may anticipate them by improvements at the right time, and not hold out until they are forced to yield by the pressure from beneath.

"Because I hated the Revolution, the name of the 'Friend of the powers that be' was bestowed upon me. That is, however, a very ambiguous title, which I would beg to decline. If the 'powers that be' were all that is excellent, good, and just, I should have no objection to the title; but, since with much that is good there is also much that is bad, unjust, and imperfect, a friend of the 'powers that be' means often little less than the friend of the obsolete and bad.

"But time is constantly progressing, and human affairs wear every fifty years a different aspect; so that an arrangement which, in the year 1800, was perfection, may, perhaps, in the year 1850 be a defect.

"And, furthermore, nothing is good for a nation but that which arises from its own core and its own general wants, without apish imitation of another; since what to one race of people, of a certain age, is a wholesome nutriment, may perhaps prove a poison for another. All endeavours to introduce any foreign innovation, the necessity for which is not rooted in the core of the nation itself, are therefore foolish; and all premeditated revolutions of the kind are unsuccessful; for they are without God, who keeps aloof from such bungling. If, however, there exists an actual necessity for a great reform amongst a people, God is

with it, and it prospers. He was visibly with Christ and his first adherents; for the purification of the doctrine corrupted by the priests was no less a necessity. Neither of the great powers whom I have named was, however, a friend of the permanent; much more were both of them convinced that the old leaven must be got rid of, and that it would be impossible to go on and remain in the untrue, unjust, and defective way."

NAPOLEON

We spoke about the History of Napoleon by Walter Scott. "It is true," said Goethe, "that the author may be reproached with great inaccuracy and equally great partiality, but even these two defects give to his work particular value in my eyes. The success of the book, in England, was great beyond all expectation and hence we see that Walter Scott, in this very hatred for Napoleon and the French, has been the true interpreter and representative of the English popular opinion and national feeling. His book will not be by any means a document for the history of France, but it will be one of the history of England. At all events, it is a voice which could not be wanting in this important historical process:

"It is generally agreeable to me to hear the most contrary opinions of Napoleon. I am now reading the work by Bignon, which appears to me to possess particular merit."

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"Napoleon was the man! Always enlightened, always clear and decided, and endowed at every hour with sufficient energy to carry into effect whatever he considered advantage-

ous and necessary. His life was the stride of a demi-god, from battle to battle, and from victory to victory. It might well be said of him, that he was found in a state of continual enlightenment. On this account, his destiny was more brilliant than any the world had seen before him, or perhaps will ever see after him."

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"Does the productiveness of genius," said I, "lie merely in the mind of an important man, or does it also lie in the body?"

"The body has, at least," said Goethe, "the greatest influence upon it. There was indeed a time when, in Germany, a genius was always thought of as short, weak, or hunch-backed; but commend me to a genius who has a well-proportioned body.

"When it was said of Napoleon that he was a man of granite, this applied particularly to his body. What was it, then, which he could not and did not venture? From the burning sands of the Syrian deserts, to the snowy plains of Moscow, what an incalculable amount of marches, battle and nightly bivouacs did he go through? And what fatigues and bodily privations was he forced to endure? Little sleep, little nourishment and yet always in the highest mental activity. After the awful exertion and excitement of the eighteenth Brumaire, it was midnight, and he had not tasted anything during the whole day, and yet, without thinking of strengthening his body, he felt power enough in the depth of the night to draw up the well-known proclamation to the French people. When one considers what he accomplished and endured, one might imagine

that when he was in his fortieth year not a sound particle was left in him; but even at that age he still occupied the position of a perfect hero.

"But you are quite right: The real focus of his lustre belongs to his youth. And it is something to say that one of obscure origin, and at a time which set all capacities in motion, so distinguished himself as to become, in his seven-and-twentieth year, the idol of a nation of thirty millions! Yes, yes, my good friend, one must be young to do great things. And Napoleon is not the only one!"

PHILOSOPHY

"Meyer," said Goethe, laughing, "always says, 'If thinking were not so hard.' And the worst is, that all the thinking in the world does not bring us to thought; we must be right by nature, so that good thoughts may come before us like free children of God, and cry, 'Here we are!'" * * * * *

I asked Goethe which of the new philosophers he thought the highest.

"Kant," said he, "beyond a doubt. He is the one whose doctrines still continue to work, and have penetrated most deeply into our German civilization. He has influenced even you, although you have never read him; now you need him no longer, for what he could give you, you possess already. If you wish by and by to read something of his, I recommend to you his 'Critique on the Power of Judgment,' in which he has written admirably upon rhetoric, tolerably upon poetry, but unsatisfactorily on plastic art."

"Has your excellency ever had any personal connection with Kant?"

"No," he replied; "Kant never took any notice of me, though from my own nature I went a way like his own. I wrote my 'Metamorphosis of Plants' before I knew anything about Kant; and yet it is wholly in the spirit of his doctrine. The separation of subject from object, and further, the opinion that each creature exists for his own sake, and that cork trees do not grow merely that we may stop our bottles—this Kant shared with me, and I rejoiced to meet him on such ground. Afterwards I wrote my 'Doctrine of Experiment,' which is to be regarded as criticism upon subject and object, and a mediation of both.

"Schiller was always wont to advise me against the study of Kant's philosophy. He usually said Kant could give me nothing; but he himself studied Kant with great zeal; and I have studied him too, and not without profit."

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Hegel is here, whom Goethe personally esteems very highly, though he does not much relish some of the fruits produced by his philosophy. Goethe gave a tea-party in honor of him this evening, at which Zelter was also present, who intended to make his departure again tonight.

A great deal was said about Hamann, with respect to whom Hegel was chief spokesman, displaying a deep insight into this extraordinary mind, such as could only have arisen from a most earnest and scrupulous study of the subject.

The discourse then turned upon the nature

of dialectics. "They are, in fact," said Hegel, "nothing more than the regulated, methodically-cultivated spirit of contradiction which is innate in all men, and which shows itself great as a talent in the distinction between the true and the false."

"Let us only hope," interposed Goethe, "that these intellectual arts and dexterities are not frequently misused, and employed to make the false true, and the true false."

"That certainly happens," returned Hegel; "but only with people who are mentally diseased."

"I therefore congratulate myself," said Goethe, "upon the study of nature, which preserves me from such disease. For here we have to deal with the infinitely and eternally true, which throws off as incapable every one who does not proceed purely and honestly with the treatment and observation of his subject. I am also certain that many a dialectic disease would find a wholesome remedy in the study of nature."

ETHICS

The conversation then turned upon the "Antigone" of Sophocles, and the high moral tone prevailing in it; and, lastly, upon the question—how the moral element came into the world?

"Through God himself," returned Goethe, "like everything else. It is no product of human reflection, but a beautiful nature inherent and inborn."

"It is, more or less, inherent in mankind generally, but to a high degree in a few eminently

gifted minds. These have, by great deeds or doctrines, manifested their divine nature; which, then by beauty of its appearance, won the love of men, and powerfully attracted them to reverence and emulation."

"A consciousness of the worth of the morally beautiful and good could be attained by experience and wisdom inasmuch as the bad showed itself in its consequences as a destroyer of happiness, both in individuals and the whole body, while the noble and right seemed to produce and secure the happiness of one and all. The morally beautiful could become a doctrine and diffuse itself over whole nations as something plainly expressed."

"I have lately read somewhere," answered I, "the opinion that the Greek tragedy had made moral beauty a special object."

"Not so much morality," returned Goethe, "as pure humanity in its whole extent; especially in such positions where, by falling into contact with rude power, it could assume a tragic character. In this region, indeed, even the moral stood as a principal part of human nature."

"The morality of Antigone, besides, was not invented by Sophocles, but was contained in the subject, which Sophocles chose the more readily, as it united so much dramatic effect with moral beauty."

Goethe then spoke about the characters of Creon and Ismene, and on the necessity for these two persons for the development of the beautiful soul of the heroine.

"All that is noble," said he, "is in itself of a quiet nature, and appears to sleep until it is

aroused and summoned forth by contrast. Such a contrast is Creon, who is brought in, partly on account of Antigone, in order that her noble nature and the right which is on her side may be brought out by him, partly on his own account, in order that his unhappy error may appear odious to us.

"But, as Sophocles meant to display the elevated soul of his heroine even before the deed, another contrast was requisite by which her character might be developed; and this is her sister Ismene. In this character, the poet has given us a beautiful standard of the commonplace, so that the greatness of Antigone, which is above such a standard, is the more strikingly visible."

The conversation then turned upon dramatic authors in general, and upon the important influence which they exerted, and could exert, upon the great mass of the people.

"A great dramatic poet," said Goethe, "if he is at the same time productive, and is actuated by a strong noble purpose, which pervades all his works, may succeed in making the soul of his pieces become the soul of the people. I should think that this was something well worth the trouble. From Corneille proceeded an influence capable of forming heroes. This was something for Napoleon, who had need of an heroic people; on which account he said of Corneille, that if he were still living, he would make a prince of him. A dramatic poet who knows his vocation, should therefore work incessantly at its higher development, in order that his influence in the people may be noble and beneficial.

"One should not study contemporaries and competitors, but the great men of antiquity, whose works have, for centuries, received equal homage and consideration. Indeed, a man of really superior endowments will feel the necessity of this, and it is just this need for an intercourse with great predecessors, which is the sign of a higher talent. Let us study Moliere, let us study Shakespeare, but above all things, the old Greeks, and always the Greeks."

"For highly endowed natures," remarked I, "the study of the authors of antiquity may be perfectly invaluable; but in general, it appears to have little influence upon personal character. If this were the case, all philologists and theologians would be the most excellent of men. But this is by no means the case; and such connoisseurs of the ancient Greek and Latin authors are able people or pitiful creatures, according to the good or bad qualities which God has given them, or which they have inherited from their father and mother."

"There is nothing to be said against that," returned Goethe; "but it must not, therefore, be said that the study of the authors of antiquity is entirely without effect upon the formation of character. A worthless man will always remain worthless, and a little mind will not, by daily intercourse with the great minds of antiquity, become one inch greater. But a noble man, in whose soul God has placed the capability for future greatness of character, and elevation of mind, will, by a knowledge of, and familiar intercourse with, the elevated natures of ancient Greeks and Romans, every day make a visible approximation to similar greatness."

IMMORTALITY

Goethe was in excellent spirits today. He showed me Frau von Spiegel's album, in which he had written some very beautiful verses. A place had been left open for him for two years, and he rejoiced at having been able to perform at last an old promise. After I had read the "Poem to Frau von Spiegel," I turned over the leaves of the book, in which I found many distinguished names. On the very next page was a poem by Tiedge, written in the very spirit and style of his "Urania." "In a saucy mood," said Goethe, "I was on the point of writing some verses beneath those; but I am glad that I did not. It would not have been the first that, by rash expression, I had repelled good people, and spoiled the effect of my best works.

"However," continued Goethe, "I have had to endure not a little from Tiedge's 'Urania'; for, at the time, nothing was sung and nothing was declaimed but this same 'Urania.' Wherever you went, you found 'Urania' on the table. 'Urania' and immortality were the topics of every conversation. I would by no means dispense with the happiness of believing in a future existence, and, indeed, would say, with Lorenzo de Medici, that those are dead even for this life who hope for no other. But such incomprehensible matters lie too far off to be a theme of daily meditation and thought-distracting speculation. Let him who believes in immortality enjoy his happiness in silence, he has no reason to give himself airs about it. The occasion of Tiedge's 'Urania' led me to observe that piety, like nobility, has its aris-

tocracy. I met stupid women, who plumed themselves on believing, with Tiedge, in immortality, and I was forced to bear much dark examination on this point. They were vexed by my saying I should be well pleased if, after the close of this life, we were blessed with another, only I hoped I should hereafter meet none of those who had believed in it here. For how should I be tormented! The pious would throng around me, and say, 'Were we not right? Did we not predict it? Has not it happened just as we said?' And so there would be ennui without end even in the other world.

"This occupation with the ideas of immortality," he continued, "is for people of rank, and especially ladies, who have nothing to do. But an able man, who has something regular to do here, and must toil and struggle and produce day by day, leaves the future world to itself, and is active and useful in this. Thoughts about immortality are also good for those who have not been very successful here; and I would wager that, if the good Tiedge had enjoyed a better lot, he would also have had better thoughts." * * * * *

In the meanwhile, we had gone round the thicket (the Webicht), and had turned by Tiefurt into the Weimar road, where we had a view of the setting sun. Goethe was for a while lost in thought; he then said to me, in the words of one of the ancients—

Untergehend sogar ist's immer dieselbige Sonne.

"Still it continues the self-same sun, e'en while it is sinking."

"At the age of seventy-five," continued he,

with much cheerfulness, one must, of course, think sometimes of death. But this thought never gives me the least uneasiness, for I am fully convinced that our spirit is a being of a nature quite indestructible, and that its activity continues from eternity to eternity. It is like the sun, which seems to set only to our earthly eyes, but which, in reality, never sets, but shines on unceasingly." * * * * *

"I have continued to read Schubart," said Goethe. "He is, indeed, a remarkable man, and he says much that is excellent, if we translate it into our own language. The chief tendency of his book is to show that there is a point of view beyond the sphere of philosophy,—namely, that of common-sense; and that art and science, independently of philosophy, and by means of a free action of natural human powers, have always thriven best. This is grist for our mill. I have always kept myself free from philosophy. The common-sense view was also mine; and hence Schubart confirms what I myself have been saying and doing all my life.

"The only thing I cannot commend in him is this that he knows certain things better than he will confess, and does not therefore go quite honestly to work. Like Hegel, he would bring the Christian religion into philosophy, though it really has nothing to do with it. Christianity has a might of its own, by which dejected, suffering humanity is re-elevated from time to time, and when we grant it this power, it is raised above all philosophy, and needs no support therefrom. Neither does the philosopher need the countenance of religion to prove cer-

tain doctrines; as, for instance, eternal duration. Man should believe in immortality; he has a right to this belief; it corresponds with the wants of his nature, and he may believe in the promises of religion. But if the philosopher tries to deduce the immortality of the soul from a legend, that is very weak and inefficient. To me, the eternal existence of my soul is proved from my idea of activity; if I work on incessantly till my death, nature is bound to give me another form of existence when the present one can no longer sustain my spirit."

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I told Goethe of a person now travelling through Weimar, who had heard a lecture of Hegel's on the proof of the existence of a God. Goethe agreed with me that the time for such lectures was gone by.

"The period of doubt," said he, "is past; men now doubt as little the existence of a God as their own, though the nature of the divinity, the immortality, the peculiarities of our own souls, and their connection with our bodies, are eternal problems, with respect to which our philosophers take us no farther. A French philosopher, of the most recent times, begins his chapter confidently thus:

"It is acknowledged that man consists of two parts, body and soul; accordingly, we will begin with the body, and then speak of the soul.'"

"Fichte went a little farther, and extricated himself somewhat more cleverly from the dilemma, by saying—'We shall treat of man regarded as a body, and of man regarded as a soul.' He felt too well that a so closely combined whole could not be separated. Kant has

unquestionably done the best service, by drawing the limits beyond which human intellect is not able to penetrate, and leaving at rest the insoluble problems. What a deal have people philosophized about immortality—and how far have they got? I doubt not of our immortality, for nature cannot dispense with the *entelecheia*. But we are not all, in like manner, immortal; and he who would manifest himself in future as a great *entelecheia*, must be one now."

RELIGION

'It is natural to man," said Goethe, "to regard himself as the final cause of creation, and to consider all other things merely in relation to himself so far as they are of use to him. He makes himself master of the vegetable and animal world, and while he claims other creatures as a fitting diet, he acknowledges his God, and praises His goodness in this paternal care. He takes milk from the cow, honey from the bee, wool from the sheep; and while he gives these things a purpose which is useful to himself, he believes that they were made on that account. Nay, he cannot conceive that even the smallest herb was not made for him, and if he has not yet ascertained its utility, he believes that he may discover it in future.

"Then, too, as man thinks in general, so does he always think in particular, and he does not fail to transfer his ordinary views from life into science, and to ask the use and purpose of every single part of our organic being.

"This may do for a time, and he may get on so for a time in science, but he will soon come to phenomena, where this small view will not

be sufficient, and where, if he does not take a higher stand, he will soon be involved in mere contradictions.

"The utility-teachers say that oxen have horns to defend themselves: but I ask, why is the sheep without any—and when it has them, why are they twisted about the ears so as to answer no purpose at all?

"If, on the other hand, I say the ox defends himself with his horns because he has them, it is quite a different matter.

"The question as to the purpose—the question *Wherefore* is completely unscientific. But we get on farther with the question *How*? For if I ask how has the ox horns, I am led to study his organization, and learn at the same time why the lion has no horns, and cannot have any.

"Thus, man has in his skull two hollows which are never filled up. The question wherefore could not take us far in this case, but the question how informs me that these hollows are remains of the animal skull, which are found on a larger scale in inferior organization, and are not quite obliterated in man, with all his eminence.

"The teachers of utility would think that they lost their God if they did not worship Him who gave the ox horns to defend itself. But I hope I may be allowed to worship Him who, in the abundance of His creation, was great enough, after making a thousand kinds of plants, to make one more, in which all the rest should be comprised; and after a thousand kinds of animals, a being which comprises them all—a man.

"Let people serve Him who gives to the beast his fodder, and to man meat and drink as much as he can enjoy. But I worship Him who has infused into the world such a power of production, that, when only the millionth part of it comes out into life, the world swarms with creatures to such a degree that war, pestilence, fire, and water cannot prevail against them. That is my God!"

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"If," continued Goethe, "when the truth was once found, people would not again pervert and obscure it, I should be satisfied; for mankind requires something positive, to be handed down from generation to generation, and it would be well if the positive were also the true. On this account, I should be glad if people came to a clear understanding in natural science, and then adhered to the truth, not transcending again after all had been done in the region of the incomprehensible. But mankind cannot be at peace, and confusion always returns before one is aware of it.

"Thus they are now pulling to pieces the five books of Moses, and if an annihilating criticism is injurious in anything, it is so in matters of religion; for here everything depends upon faith, to which we cannot return when we have once lost it."

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Frau and Herr von Goethe came in, and we sat down to dinner. The lively topics of the day, such as the theatre, balls and the court, were lightly discussed; but soon we came to more serious matters, and found ourselves deeply engaged in conversation on the religious doctrines of England.

"You ought, like me," said Goethe, "to have studied Church history for fifty years, to understand how all this hangs together. On the other hand, it is highly remarkable to see with what doctrines the Mahometans commence the work of education. As a religious foundation, they confirm their youth in the conviction that nothing can happen to man, except what was long since decreed by an all-ruling divinity. With this they are prepared and satisfied for a whole life, and scarce need anything further.

"I will not inquire what is true or false, useful or pernicious, in this doctrine; but really something of this faith is held in us all, even without being taught. 'The ball on which my name is not written, cannot hit me,' says the soldier in the battle-field; and, without such a belief, how could he maintain such courage and cheerfulness in the most imminent perils? The Christian doctrine, 'No sparrow falls to the ground without the consent of our Father,' comes from the same source, intimating that there is a Providence, which keeps in its eye the smallest things, and without whose will and permission nothing can happen.

"Then the Mahometans begin their instruction in philosophy, with the doctrine that nothing exists of which the contrary may not be affirmed. Thus they practise the minds of youth, by giving them the task of detecting and expressing the opposite of every proposition; from which great adroitness in thinking and speaking is sure to arise.

"Certainly, after the contrary of any proposition has been maintained, doubt arises as to which is really true. But there is no perman-

ence in doubt; it incites the mind to closer inquiry and experiment, from which, if rightly managed, certainty proceeds, and in this alone can man find thorough satisfaction.

"You see that nothing is wanting in this doctrine; that with all our systems, we have got no further; and that, generally speaking, no one can get further."

"You remind me of the Greeks," said I, "Who made use of a similar mode of philosophical instruction, as is obvious from their tragedy, which, in its course of action, rests wholly upon contradiction, not one of the speakers ever maintaining any opinion of which the other cannot, with equal dexterity, maintain the contrary."

"You are perfectly right," said Goethe; "and that doubt is brought in which is awakened in the spectator or reader. Thus, at the end, we are brought to certainty by fate, which attaches itself to the moral, and espouses its cause."

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Frau von Goethe, young Goethe, and Fraeulein Ulrica now came in, and we sat down to table. The conversation was gay and varied, the pietists of some cities in Northern Germany being a subject to which we often reverted. It was remarked that these pietistical separations had destroyed the harmony of whole families.

"I was able to give an instance of the kind, having nearly lost an excellent friend because he could not convert me to his opinions. He, as I stated, was thoroughly convinced that good works and one's own merits are of no avail, and that man can only win favour with the divinity by the grace of Christ.

"A female friend," observed Frau von Goethe, "said something of the sort to me; but even now I scarcely know what is meant by grace and what by good works."

"According to the present course of the world, in conversing on all such topics," said Goethe, "there is nothing but a medley; and perhaps none of you know whence it comes. I will tell you. The doctrine of good works—namely, that man, by good actions, legacies, and beneficent institutions, can avoid the penalty of sin, and rise in the favours of God—is Catholic. But the reformers, out of opposition, rejected this doctrine, and declared, in lieu of it that man must seek solely to recognize the merits of Christ and become a partaker of his grace; which indeed leads to good works. But, nowadays, all this is mingled together, and nobody knows whence a thing comes."

I remarked, more in thought than openly, that difference of opinion in religious matters had always sown dissension among men, and, made them enemies; nay, that the first murder had been caused by a difference in the mode of worshipping God. I said that I had lately been reading Byron's "Cain," and had been particularly struck by the third act, and the manner in which the murder is brought about.

"It is indeed admirable," said Goethe. "Its beauty is such as we shall not see a second time in the world."

"Cain," said I, "was at first prohibited in England; but now everybody reads it, and young English travellers usually carry a complete Byron with them."

"It was folly," said Goethe; "for, in fact,

there is nothing in the whole of Cain which is not taught by the English bishops themselves."

GOD

We then spoke upon religious subjects, and the abuse of the divine name. "People treat it," said Goethe, "as if that incomprehensible and most high Being, who is even beyond the reach of thought, were only their equal. Otherwise they would not say the *Lord God*, the *dear God*, the *good God*. This expression becomes to them, especially to the clergy, who have it daily in their mouths, a mere phrase a barren name, to which no thought is attached whatever. If they were impressed by His greatness they would be dumb and through veneration unwilling to name Him."

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"Without my attempts in natural science, I should never have learned to know mankind such as it is. In nothing else can we so closely approach pure contemplation and thought, so closely observe the errors of the senses and of the understanding, the weak and the strong points of character. All is more or less pliant and wavering, is more or less manageable; but nature understands no jesting; she is always true, always serious, always severe; she is always right, and the error and faults are always those of man. Him, who is incapable of appreciating her she despises; and only to the apt, the pure, and the true, does she resign herself, and reveal her secrets.

"The understanding will not reach her; man must be capable of elevating himself to the highest Reason to come into contact with the

Divinity, which manifests itself in the primitive phenomenon (*Urphaenomenen*), which dwells behind them, and from which they proceed.

"The divinity works in the living not in the dead; in the becoming and changing, not in the become and the fixed. Therefore reason, with its tendency towards the divine, has only to do with the becoming, the living; but understanding with the become, the already fixed, that it may make use of it."

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Before dinner, while walking in the Erfurt road, I met Goethe, who stopped me and took me into his carriage. We went a good way by the fir-wood, and talked about natural history.

The mountains and hills were covered with snow, and I mentioned the great delicacy of the yellow, observing that at a distance of nine miles, with some density intervening, a dark surface rather appeared blue than a white one yellow. Goethe agreed with me, and we then spoke of the high significance of the primitive phenomena, behind which we believe the Deity may directly be discerned.

"I ask not," said Goethe, "whether this highest Being has reason and understanding, but I feel that He is Reason, is Understanding itself. Therewith are all creatures penetrated; and man has so much of it that he can recognize parts of the Highest."

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We talked of the Theory of Colours, and among other things about drinking glasses, the dull figures on which appear yellow against the light, and blue against the dark, and therefore

allow the observation of a primitive phenomenon.

"The highest which man can attain in these matters," said Goethe, on this occasion, "is astonishment; if the primary phenomenon causes this, let him be satisfied; more it cannot bring; and he should forbear to seek for anything further behind it: here is the limit. But the sight of a primitive phenomenon is generally not enough for people; they think they must go still further; and are thus like children who, after peeping into a mirror, turn it round directly to see what is on the other side."

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This evening for an hour with Goethe, talking of various interesting subjects. I had bought an English Bible, in which I found, to my great regret, that the apocryphal books were not contained. They had been rejected, because they were not considered genuine and of divine origin. I greatly missed the noble Tobias, that model of a pious life, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Jesus Sirach,—all writings of such high mental and moral elevation, that few others equal them. I spoke to Goethe of my regret at the very narrow view by which some of the writings of the Old Testament are looked upon as immediately proceeding from God; while others, equally excellent, are not so. As if there could be anything noble and great which did not proceed from God, and which was not a fruit of his influence.

"I am thoroughly of your opinion," returned Goethe. "Still, there are two points of view from which biblical subjects may be contemplated. There is the point of view of a sort of

primitive religion, of pure nature and reason, which is of divine origin. This will always be the same, and will last and prevail as long as divinely endowed beings exist. It is, however, only for the elect, and is far too high and noble to become universal. Then there is the point of view of the Church, which is of a more human nature. This is defective and subject to change; but it will last, in a state of perpetual change, as long as there are weak human beings. The light of unclouded divine revelation is far too pure and brilliant to be suitable and supportable to poor weak man. But the Church steps in as a useful mediator, to soften and to moderate, by which all are helped, and **many** are benefited. Through the belief that the Christian Church, as the successor of Christ, can remove the burden of human sin, it is a very great power. To maintain themselves in this power and in this importance, and thus to secure the ecclesiastical edifice, is the chief aim of the Christian priesthood.

"This priesthood, therefore, does not so much ask whether this or that book in the Bible greatly enlightens the mind, and contains doctrines of high morality and noble human nature. It rather looks upon the books of Moses, with reference to the fall of man and the origin of a necessity for a Redeemer; it searches the prophets for repeated allusion to Him, the Expected One, and regards, in the Gospels, His actual earthly appearance, and His death upon the cross, as the atonement for our human sins. You see, therefore, that for such purposes, and weighted in such a balance, neither the noble Tobias nor the Wisdom of Solomon, nor the

sayings of Sirach, can have much weight. Still, with reference to things in the Bible, the question whether they are genuine or spurious is odd enough. What is genuine but that which is truly excellent, which stands in harmony with the purest nature and reason, and which even now ministers to our highest development! What is spurious but the absurd and the hollow, which brings no fruit—at least, no good fruit! If the authenticity of a biblical book is to be decided by the question,—whether something true throughout has been handed down to us, we might on some points doubt the authenticity of the Gospels, since those of Mark and Luke were not written from immediate presence and experience, but, according to oral tradition, long afterwards; and the last, by the disciple John, was not written till he was of a very advanced age. Nevertheless, I look upon all the four Gospels as thoroughly genuine; for there is in them the reflection of a greatness which emanated from the person of Jesus, and which was of as divine a kind as ever was seen upon earth. If I am asked whether it is in my nature to pay Him devout reverence, I say—certainly! I bow before Him as the divine manifestation of the highest principle of morality. If I am asked whether it is in my nature to revere the Sun, I again say—certainly! For he is likewise a manifestation of the highest Being, and indeed the most powerful which we children of earth are allowed to behold. I adore in him the light and the productive power of God; by which we all live, move, and have our being—we, and all the plants and animals with us. But if I am asked

—whether I am inclined to bow before a thumb-bone of the apostle Peter or Paul, I say—‘Spare me, and stand off with your absurdities!’

“‘Quench not the spirit,’ says the apostle. There are many absurdities in the propositions of the Church; nevertheless, rule it will, and so it must have a narrow-minded multitude, which bows its head and likes to be ruled. The high and richly-endowed clergy dread nothing more than the enlightenment of the lower orders. They withheld the Bible from them as long as it was possible. Besides, what can a poor member of the Christian Church think of the princely magnificence of a richly-endowed bishop, when he sees in the Gospels the poverty and indigence of Christ, who, with his disciples, travelled humbly on foot, whilst the princely bishop rattles along in his carriage drawn by six horses!

“We scarcely know,” continued Goethe, “what we owe to Luther, and the Reformation in general. We are freed from the fetters of spiritual narrow-mindedness; we have, in consequence of our increasing culture, become capable of turning back to the fountain head, and of comprehending Christianity in its purity. We have, again, the courage to stand with firm feet upon God’s earth, and to feel ourselves in our divinely-endowed human nature. Let mental culture go on advancing, let the natural sciences go on gaining in depth and breadth, and the human mind expand as it may, it will never go beyond the elevation and moral culture of Christianity as it glistens and shines forth in the gospel!

“But the better we Protestants advance in

our noble development, so much the more rapidly will the Catholics follow us. As soon as they feel themselves caught up by the ever-extending enlightenment of the time, they must go on, do what they will, till at last the point is reached where all is but one.

"The mischievous sectarianism of the Protestants will also cease, and with it the hatred and hostile feeling between father and son, sister and brother; for as soon as the pure doctrine and love of Christ are comprehended in their true nature, and have become a vital principle, we shall feel ourselves as human beings, great and free, and not attach especial importance to a degree more or less in the outward forms of religion. Besides, we shall all gradually advance from a Christianity of words and faith, to a Christianity of feeling and action."

CHRIST

I have been reading the New Testament, and thinking of a picture which Goethe lately showed me, where Christ is walking on the water, and Peter coming towards him, on the waves, begins to sink, in a moment of faint-heartedness.

"This," said Goethe, "is one of the most beautiful legends, and one which I love better than any. It expresses the noble doctrine that man, through faith and hearty courage, will come off victor in the most difficult enterprises, while he may be ruined by the least paroxysm of doubt." * * * * *

The conversation turned upon the great men who had lived before Christ, among the Chinese, the Indians, the Persians, and the Greeks;

and it was remarked, that the divine power had been as operative in them as in some of the great Jews of the Old Testament. We then came to the question how far God influenced the great natures of the present world in which we live?

"To hear people speak," said Goethe, "one would almost believe that they were of opinion that God had withdrawn into silence since those old times, and that man was now placed quite upon his own feet, and had to see how he could get on without God, and his daily invisible breath. In religious and moral matters, a divine influence is indeed still allowed, but in matters of science and art it is believed that they are merely earthly, and nothing but the product of human powers.

"Let any one only try, with human will and human power, to produce something which may be compared with the creations that bear the names of *Mozart*, *Raphael*, or *Shakespeare*. I know very well that these three noble beings are not the only ones, and that in every province of art innumerable excellent geniuses have operated, who have produced things as perfectly good as those just mentioned. But if they were as great as those, they rose above ordinary human nature, and in the same proportion were as divinely endowed as they.

"And after all what does it all come to? God did not retire to rest after the well-known six days of creation, but, on the contrary, is constantly active as on the first. It would have been for Him a poor occupation to compose this heavy world out of simple elements, and to keep it rolling in the sunbeams from year

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to year, if He had not had the plan of founding a nursery for a world of spirits upon this material basis. So He is now constantly active in higher natures to attract the lower ones."

Goethe was silent. But I cherished his great and good words in my heart.

GOETHE'S END

The morning after Goethe's death, a deep desire seized me to look once again upon his earthly garment. His faithful servant, Frederic, opened for me the chamber in which he was laid out. Stretched upon his back, he reposed as if asleep; profound peace and security reigned in the features of his sublimely noble countenance. The mighty brow seemed yet to harbour thoughts. I wished for a lock of his hair; but reverence prevented me from cutting it off. The body lay naked, only wrapped in a white sheet; large pieces of ice had been placed near it, to keep it fresh as long as possible. Frederic drew aside the sheet, and I was astonished at the divine magnificence of the limbs. The breast was powerful, broad, and arched; the arms and thighs were full, and softly muscular; the feet were elegant, and of the most perfect shape; nowhere, on the whole body, was there a trace either of fat or of leanness and decay. A perfect man lay in great beauty before me and the rapture which the sight caused made me forget for a moment that the immortal spirit had left such an abode. I laid my hand on his heart—there was a deep silence—and I turned away to give free vent to my suppressed tears.

